THE HISTORY OF

ROCK

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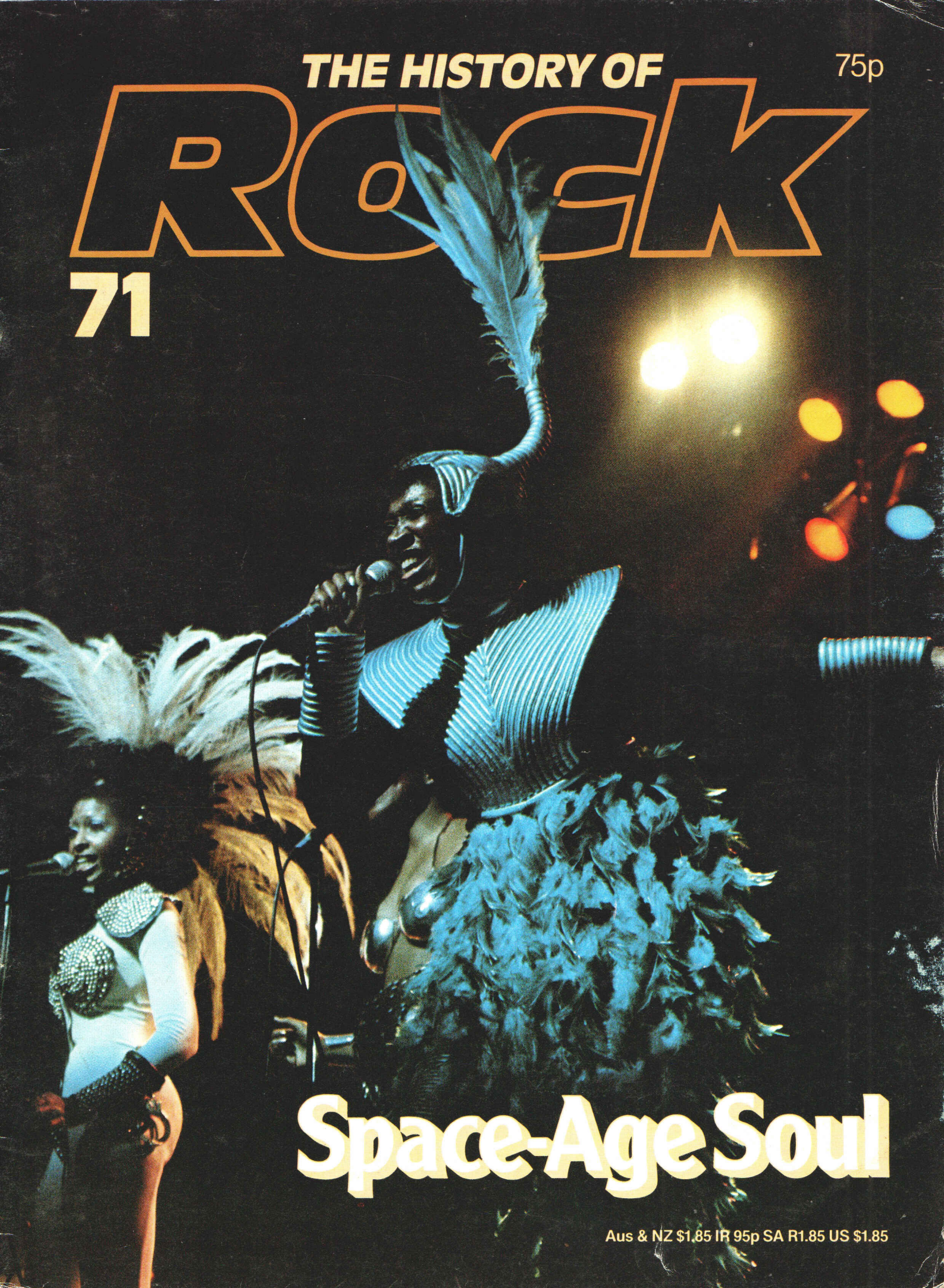

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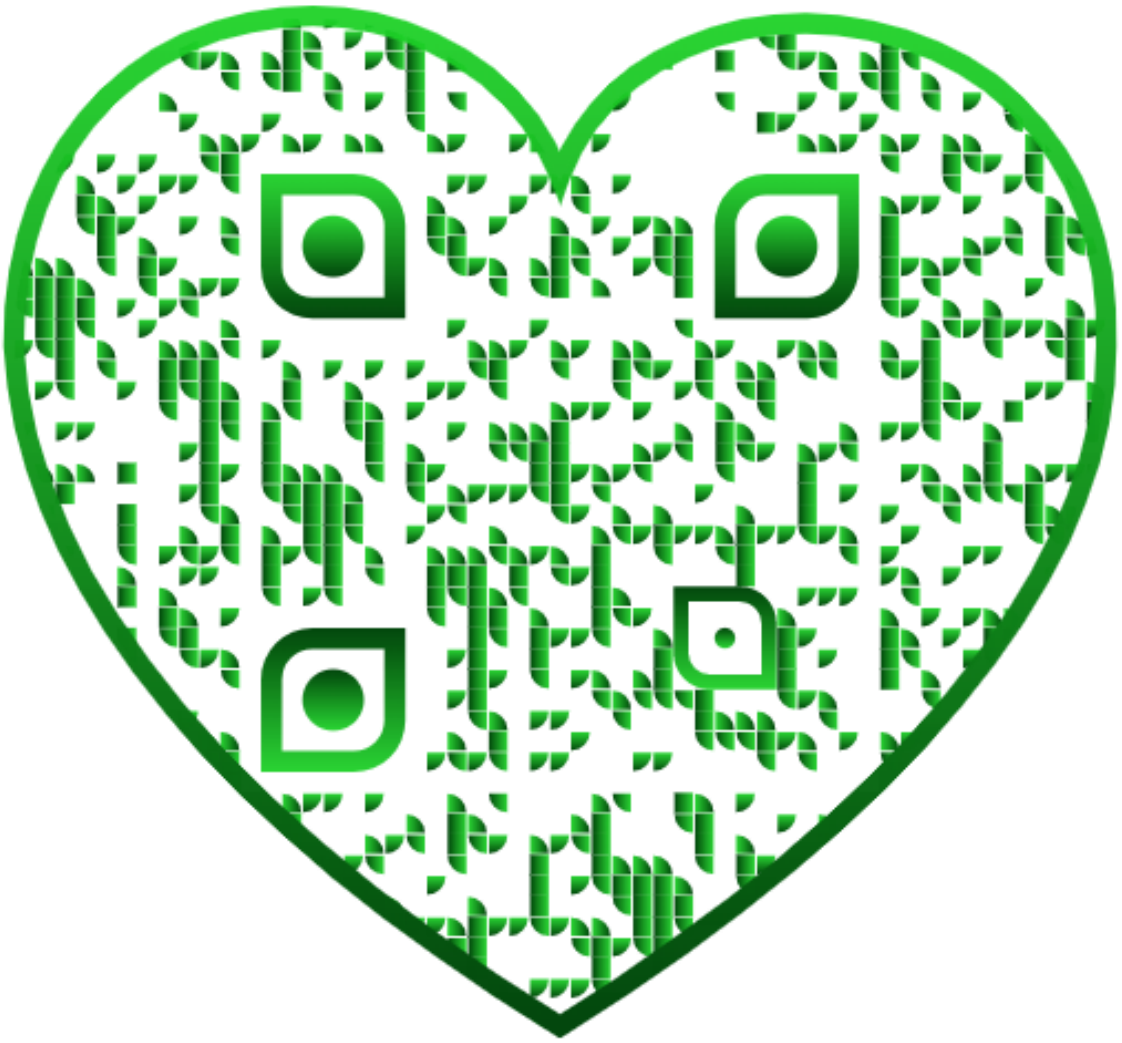

THE HISTORY OF ROCK

Published weekly by Orbis Publishing Limited
Orbis House, 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

Volume 6 Issue 71

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Acknowledgements

Blues and Soul 1410; **Adrian Boot** 1403; **CBS Records** Cover, 1415, 1416, 1417(T), Inside back cover(L); **Andre Csillag** 1401; **William Gottlieb/David Redfern Photography** 1419(Lt); **Jazz Journal International** 1418(Lb); **J. P. Leloir** 1411; **London Features International** 1412, 1413, 1414(B), 1418(R); **LFI/Mike Putland** 1409, Inside back cover(R), Back cover; **Melody Maker** 1405; **Motown Records** 1420(T); **Michael Ochs** 1418(Lt); **Pictorial Press** 1402(R), 1420(B); **Barry Plummer** 1406/1407; **Rare Pic** 1414(T); **David Redfern Photography** 1402(L), 1404; **Rex Features** 1419(R); **Val Wilmer** 1419(Lb). Photo retouching by **Roy Flooks.** Discographies compiled by **Michael Heatley.**

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The new-found respectability that rock enjoyed in the late Sixties and early Seventies left a vacuum on radio playlists – and, perhaps more importantly, on the bedroom walls of British youngsters. Glam-rock supplied the perfect answer, with its emphasis on image and its catchy, commercial sounds. Marc Bolan was a trailblazer, adapting his hippie lyrics for an electric music, while Gary Glitter was perhaps the most outrageous (and successful) of those who jumped onto the glam bandwagon.

The History of Rock Price U.K. 75p I.R. 95p Aus. & N.Z. $1.85 S.A. R1.85 U.S.A. $1.85.

How to obtain copies of The History of Rock Copies are obtainable by placing a regular order at your newsagent or by taking out a subscription. **Subscription rates:** For six months (26 issues) £23.00; for one year (52 issues) £46.00. Send your order and remittance to Rock Subscriptions, Punch Subscriptions Services, Watling Street, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Bucks MK2 2BW., being sure to state the number of the first issue required.

Back numbers **U.K. & Eire:** Back Nos. are obtainable from your newsagent or from **History of Rock** Back Nos. Orbis Publishing Ltd., 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT at cover price. **Australia:** Back Nos. are obtainable from **The History of Rock** Back Nos., Gordon and Gotch (Aus) Ltd, 114 William Street, PO Box 767G, Melbourne, Vic 3001. **New Zealand, South Africa, Europe & Malta:** Back Nos. are available at cover price from your newsagent. In case of difficulty write to the address in your country given for binders. South African readers should add sales tax.

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Paint it Black

Psychedelia inspired black music to stand up and adopt different colours

POPULAR MYTHOLOGY has the precocious bastard, rock, cannibalising black culture for profit and acclaim while the originators languish in undeserved obscurity. The truth is rather more complex; as progressive rock and the singer-songwriter boom grew in the late Sixties, so a new breed of black star appeared – one that was not slow to take advantage of rock's new freedoms. But this was only the most obvious manifestation of a cross-fertilisation process between black and white music that had its origins nearly half a century before.

Musicians have never respected boundaries – country singers recorded many authentic blues in the Twenties and early Thirties. Similarly, bluesmen relished Jimmie Rodgers and many recorded in his shadow. Cross-fertilisation continued throughout the Thirties, notably when Texan Bob Wills fused country with jazz and blues to produce Western swing, while in Kentucky, bluegrass exponents like Bill and Charles Monroe unleashed their own brand of blues.

The immediate postwar years saw blues-soaked country music played in juke-joints throughout the segregated South. The flowering of rockabilly – the so-called genesis of rock – was hardly new, but Presley carried it beyond the South to the world at large. Between 1956 and 1963 Presley had 28 entries in *Billboard's* R&B chart, including four Number 1 hits, and was the most popular white artist with black audiences worldwide. He was the first rock singer significantly to affect black music, and his extravagant vocal stylings were continually copied. Whatever he assimilated of blues or gospel was transformed and returned to the R&B mainstream.

Soul brothers

By the early Sixties, Memphis provided racially integrated house bands at Stax where white session men, like Steve Cropper and Donald Dunn, exerted considerable influence on the development of soul. Some had even seen service in the old Sun studios, but now backed new black attractions like Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett and Aretha Franklin. Redding had tasted success in Europe with the Stax tour package and realised that he could reach a wider audience. He had already covered the Stones' 'Satisfaction' in 1966: his next move was to play the Monterey Festival the following year alongside Jimi Hendrix, a black guitar king who fitted in well with white rock usage of blues tradition. Just before his untimely death in late 1967, Redding was courting the white pop audience with 'Dock Of The Bay', significantly his biggest hit.

The new look of soul music as it moved into the Seventies was epitomised by Sly Stone (right) – funky, irreverent and outrageously attired.

It was an era of restless creativity and rapid change. An educated and newly affluent middle class were rampaging across the campuses of America, questioning received values and revamping a culture. If Fifties R&B and redneck equivalents spoke to the body, student youth of the Sixties were determined to address the head as well. Bob Dylan was the first to make the point and the acid rock explosion of San Francisco rammed home the new ethos.

The first soul figures to entertain psychedelia seriously were Sly and the Family Stone, who played the Bay Area. Discarding any idea that they were token blacks on the liberal rock scene, Sylvester Stewart and his aptly-named group seized the time. In a storm of spikey, rock-fused funk, they pulverised America with the injunction 'Dance To The Music' in January 1968. Just over a year later the chart-topping 'Stand!' electrified the Woodstock generation, becoming simultaneously an anthem for liberal hippiedom and impatient blacks. A succession of accomplished albums like *There's A Riot Going On* (1971) and *Fresh* (1973) then succeeded in bringing protest, surrealism and Sly's supernova personality to an R&B audience, and left a rash of racially mixed bands in his wake. Peacock posturing and quirkily elusive lyrics were soon to reach their apotheosis with Nona Hendryx's work for LaBelle and the theatrical antics of George Clinton's bands Parliament and Funkadelic.

Politics to pin-ups

With the rise of the Civil Rights movement, black artists saw the possibility of using music as a political tool. 'Don't Be A Drop-Out', pleaded James Brown in 1966 adding, with clenched fist, 'Say It Loud – I'm Black And I'm Proud' in 1968. Curtis Mayfield quietly embraced the message song, first as a member of the Impressions and then under his own name.

In Jamaica the rise of Bob Marley owed much to Mayfield. Rocking R&B stars like Roscoe Gordon, Fats Domino and Shirley and Lee fed the roots of reggae in the Fifties, but it was not until the Sixties that the Impressions, with Mayfield's songs of raised consciousness, sowed

Booker T. and his multi-racial MGs (above) epitomised the fertile – if sometimes uneasy – relationship between black and white in Sixties music.

In the Seventies, the worlds of black and white music meshed in complex ways. Reggae star Peter Tosh recorded with Mick Jagger (below right), while Sylvester (below left) could outcamp Bowie (below).

the seeds of Marley's later militant lyrics. The cool harmonies and delicate singing of the Impressions and their Chicago peers left an indelible – and more immediate – mark on the Wailers' own delivery. When they signed with Chris Blackwell's Island label in 1971, the Wailers became the first reggae band to employ the full range of modern rock technology.

The Sixties also witnessed a remarkable shift from the two-minute venom of rock'n'roll as artists like Cream, the Grateful Dead and Jimi Hendrix insisted on their right to stretch out on disc, sometimes drawing one track over a full album side. This dangerous freedom was embraced rather late in the day by black musicians in the popular arena. Isaac Hayes led the way with discursive, sumptuously orchestrated, marathon work-outs on *Hot Buttered Soul* (1969). Marvin Gaye took matters one stage further with concept albums like *What's Going On* (1971) which dared suggest that there was more to life than being a stud. When Hayes' 'symphonic' talents led him into the cinema with the score for *Shaft* (1971), the floodgates opened. Curtis Mayfield added new dimensions with *Superfly* (1972) and other soundtracks followed fast as Hollywood cashed in with stereotyped pictures of black lowlife. Musically the best offerings were Marvin Gaye's *Trouble Man* (1972), Willie Hutch's *The Mack* (1973) and Bobby Womack's *Across 110th Street* (1973).

The final legacy inherited from rock was a desire to shock. The romantic fantasies erected by Hayes in the late Sixties to satisfy a newly arrived, sophisticated black audience with money to burn on albums, rapidly came under attack. Following the sexually ambivalent, androgynous examples of Lou Reed, Mick Jagger and David Bowie came youngbloods like the Ohio Players with their sado-masochistic imagery, liberated ladies like Betty Davis and teasing transexuals like Sylvester. In the last analysis black conservatism needed shaking, but in hugging rock to their bosom the black progressives embraced the idea of a youth culture that was to prove something of a mixed blessing.

CLIVE ANDERSON

STONED SOUL

Sly Stone's revolution took no prisoners

IT IS AUDACIOUS achievement enough that a musician should at one time fundamentally alter the state and style of music in his chosen field. To do so twice is quite remarkable. That, in essence, is what Sly Stone did in the three years between 1968 and 1971. He first shook a somewhat predictable, conventionalised black music by upturning preconceptions about arrangements, instrumentation and musicians' roles, race and sex, following this by marrying black music to rock – a move that alerted white bands to the adaptability of black rhythms to rock and vice versa.

Below: Family outing. Standing, from left: Freddie Stewart (guitar), Sly, Greg Errico (drums), Rose Stewart (keyboards), Cynthia Robinson (trumpet). Seated: Larry Graham (bass) and Jerry Martini (sax and keyboards). Left: Sly Stone, rhinestone cowboy, shoots from the hip.

Born Sylvester Stewart in Dallas, Texas on 15 March 1944, he was raised from the age of nine in Vallejo, California, a Bay Area industrial town. Like most black families, the Stewarts had a church background. According to Sly himself, he made a record with a gospel group at the age of four, singing 'On The Battlefield For My Lord'. At 16, he cut 'Long Time Away', a local hit on the G&P label. He and Freddie Stewart subsequently formed the Viscanes who scored another moderate success with 'Yellow Moon', produced by George Motola on the VPM label. Motola was later to licence a clutch of previously unissued Sly Stone doowop performances to the Nashville Subbarao label in 1978. At the turn of the Fifties, Sly and Freddie Stewart had recorded rock'n'roll as the Stewart Brothers for Ensign ('The Rat') and Keen ('Yum Yum'), adding yet another influence that would surface, alongside gospel and doowop, in Sly's later work.

Sly studied music theory and composition at Vallejo Junior College, enrolled at a school of broadcasting, met pioneer FM

radio DJ Tom Donahue in 1964 and began writing and producing records in San Francisco for Donahue's Autumn label. Sly wrote pop hits for the Beau Brummels (America's answer to the British invasion of the Sixties) and Bobby Freeman, while his production assignments included the Mojo Men, the Vejtables and some of his own sides such as the instrumental 'Buttermilk'. He was responsible for the lion's share of Autumn's output, including Grace Slick and the Great Society's 'Somebody To Love' on North Beach.

Stone starts a-rollin'

When the company ran into cash-flow problems, Sly became a DJ on the black KSOL and KDIA stations, where his unpredictability won a loyal, intrigued and entertained following. It was then, in 1966, that he started to pull together his band, first named the Stoners. After several false starts, he settled on a nucleus drawn from his family, brother Freddie (born 5 June 1946) on guitar and sister Rose (25 March 1945) on keyboards. His brother had been in a band with drummer Gregg Errico (1 September 1946) and his cousin, Jerry Martini (1 October 1943), played reeds and keyboards and they were duly recruited. To these he added trumpeter Cynthia Robinson (12 January 1946) and bassist Larry Graham (14 August 1946). The group first recorded for the local Loadstone label.

With this outfit Sylvester Stewart became his hip dude alter ego, the street-smart Sly Stone and made a stew of white rock, new psychedelic ideas, hippie philosophies of love, peace and brotherhood, family feelings and the fundamentals of black R&B, soul and funk.

Black music was susceptible to new influences at the end of the Sixties because, although by no means utterly moribund, it had settled into a pattern in which certain sounds and styles dominated. Motown and Stax, Detroit and Muscle Shoals had become hit factories with all the faults that production-line music-making can perpetuate. The years 1968 and 1969 saw those factories turn out such records as Wilson Pickett's 'Funky Broadway', Gladys Knight and the Pips' 'I Heard It Through The Grapevine', Sam and Dave's 'Soul Man', and Smokey Robinson and the Miracles' 'I Second That Emotion'. All topped the R&B charts, so clearly there was still a market for 'straight' soul music.

Sly took the instrumentation of the rock band, the vocal power of gospel harmony groups, the driving funk rhythms of James Brown, the horn arrangements of Stax and shuffled the pack. The band he carefully selected to play around with this 'melting-pot music' also confounded expectations. The two women instrumentalists in the multi-racial band wore clothes of eye-damaging garishness, mixing satin and leather, velvet and denim, plumes and flares. Vocals were shared between the band and, while lacking the purity and technical skill of traditional black singers

(although bassist Larry Graham's deep voice had a resonance worthy of the best baritones), they had an undeniable vitality and freshness. Combined with the fact that they played their own instruments and weren't dressed in the identikit matching suits of the normal black singing groups, Sly and the Family Stone broke most of the rules of black music.

Signing with manager David Kapralik and the CBS label, the resulting single, 'Underdog', and album, *A Whole New Thing*, were by no means outstanding. Encouraged to produce a poppier, more light-hearted, positive and accessible sound and message, Sly offered 'Dance To The Music' in January 1968. The record's infectious, enthusiastic delivery and acappella vocal section caught the imagination and took the record to Number 8 in the Hot Hundred. The double-sided hit 'Everyday People'/'Sing A Simple Song' later that year was Sly's first Number 1 in the US, and presaged a number of hits, all in typical exultant style: 'Stand!'; 'I Want To Take You Higher' – the performance of which at Woodstock was one of the Festival's most vivid images; 'Hot Fun In The Summertime'; and 'Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)', which showed signs of the coming change in style.

A pilgrim's progress

Having turned out a succession of optimistic good-time hit singles, Sly Stone swung violently to the left and released not the promised 'up' album, *The Incredible And Unpredictable Sly And The Family Stone*, but the delayed and costly *There's A Riot Goin' On*, a dark, brooding vision of the blacks' life in America ameliorated only by his wry humour. Instead of the good vibes and party spirit that had infused Sly's first hits, he suddenly bared the troubled mind and soul of an artist who realised the contradictions of encouraging celebration, as he had been doing so effectively, when the country – and most particularly his people – were plainly in neither the mood nor the condition to enter into the festivities.

A combination of the blacks' long-standing ills – discrimination, poverty, their crime and drugs escape-routes, the numbers being conscripted to die in a futile war in Asia – were in no way minimised by

Above: Sly and the Family Stone's stage performances often resembled riotous fancy-dress parties. Sly's ubiquitous cowboy gear landed him on the wrong side of the law, however, when his toy gun was mistaken for the real thing in a New York shop, and he was promptly arrested.

the increase in affluent, middle-class blacks whose ranks Sly had joined since his success. It was as though he had toured the ghetto streets again in remembrance of his roots, made a personal pilgrimage, and that the irrefutable conclusions of this journey had forced him to turn his back on the solid successes of the previous years in the white marketplace and produce music that mirrored lives far less comfortable. Far from damaging record sales, this 'topical' introspection lifted *Riot* to Number 1 in the LP charts.

There was a two year gap before 1973's *Fresh*, which was indeed a brisker, brighter affair siring three subsequent hit singles ('If You Want Me To Stay', 'Frisky' and 'If It Were Left Up To Me'), plus a version of the old Doris Day hit 'Que Sera Sera'. That prophetic version of an unlikely song was one of a series of wayward events that now peppered Sly's somewhat frantic, very public 'private' life. An audience expects stars to lead a hectic social life, but becomes less enchanted with it as soon as it affects their work or they begin simply to look ridiculous, for that makes the public look fools too.

The maverick Sly, even before *Riot*, was beginning to earn a reputation for late appearances at concerts, often not showing at all; one concert in Washington in 1970 culminated in a genuine riot. Rumours of his increasing dependency on drugs and pressure being exerted by black political groups proliferated. He was arrested for possession of cocaine. Ridiculous episodes combined to make Sly seem less of the innovative musician linking the James Brown era of the Sixties with the many emerging funk bands of the Seventies and more of a shambling buffoon. A woman passing by a shop in New York saw Sly, dressed in his by-now customary cowboy gear, brandishing a toy gun which she believed to be real; he was arrested again.

In 1974 he married Kathy Silva in the most public of circumstances, during a concert at a sell-out Madison Square Garden, one of the gigs he *did* turn up for. His marriage and child were celebrated on *Small Talk*, an album that revealed music of increasing slightness. It gave him two minor single hits, 'Time For Livin'' and the raucous 'Loose Booty'.

High on Sly

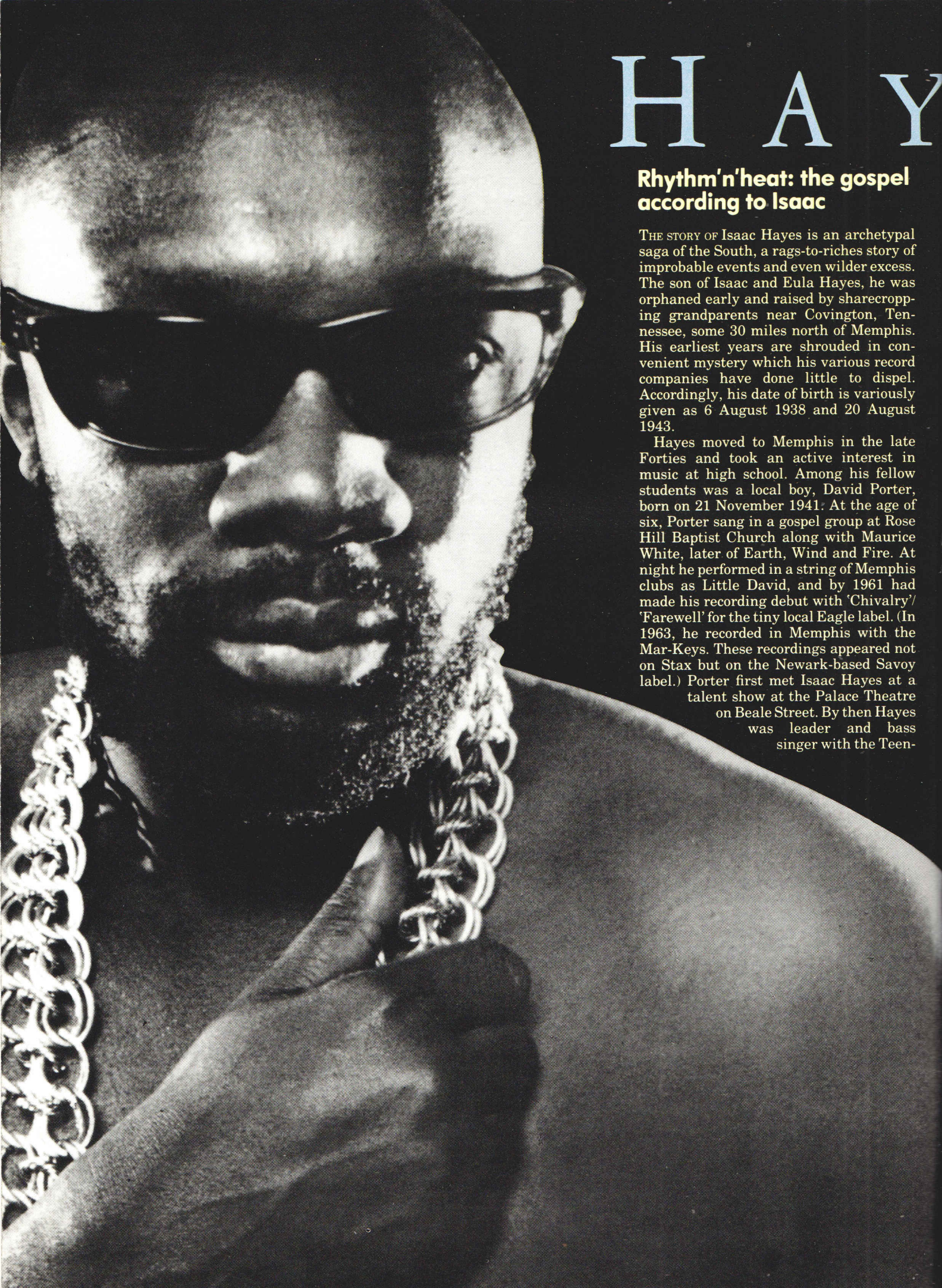
By the mid Seventies the Family Stone had all but disintegrated. Drummer Errico and bassist Graham had quit during the making of *Fresh* (Graham formed the excellent Graham Central Station and later became a successful solo artist) and while Rose, Cynthia, Jerry and Freddie were still in the band and Vanetta Stone increased the sense of the Family Stone in both name and numbers, the special spirit that prevailed in the band at the beginning had gone and the music's spirit had waned too. 1975's *High On You* was a retread LP; superficially promising, but the songs couldn't sustain the old power. *High Energy*, a double set of old material containing none of the hit singles, was a peculiar addition to his discography shortly afterwards. A year later *Heard Ya Missed Me, Well I'm Back* was issued, a thoroughly dreadful set of songs that represented the nadir of Sly's recording career.

Sylvester Stewart remained silent for the following three years. By 1979 he'd left CBS for Warner Brothers and, with producer Mark Davis, put out *Back On The Right Track*, a fairly accurate title – but then *Missed Me* had been so far off-beam that one expected little else than an improvement. Also in 1979 CBS had producer John Luongo remix Sly's old dance hits for the then-booming disco market. The album, *Ten Years Too Soon*, was itself approximately three years too late; not an appropriate tribute.

Despite the flagging inspiration that characterised most of Sly Stone's music from 1974 onwards, there can be no question of his central importance to the development of popular music, predominantly black, from 1969 onwards. The intricacies of arrangement in his music between 1968 and 1971 finally gave the lie to the white rock audience's assumptions about the simplistic nature of black music when compared with the increasing pretensions of progressive rock. Such artists as the Isley Brothers, Prince and the Parliament/Funkadelic combine built on the foundations laid by Sly's extravagant image and stage act with some success. And, though he may not be participating, the musical riot Sly Stone instigated was still going on in the Eighties. GEOFF BROWN

Sly and the Family Stone
Recommended Listening

Greatest Hits (CBS 32029) (Includes: Stand!, Hot Fun In The Summertime, Dance To The Music, Sing A Simple Song, Life, Fun, M'Lady); *There's A Riot Goin' On* (Epic 64613) (Includes: Thank You For Talking To Me Africa, Brave and Strong, Africa Talks to You [The Asphalt Jungle], Runnin' Away, Family Affair).



HAY

Rhythm'n'heat: the gospel according to Isaac

THE STORY OF Isaac Hayes is an archetypal saga of the South, a rags-to-riches story of improbable events and even wilder excess. The son of Isaac and Eula Hayes, he was orphaned early and raised by sharecropping grandparents near Covington, Tennessee, some 30 miles north of Memphis. His earliest years are shrouded in convenient mystery which his various record companies have done little to dispel. Accordingly, his date of birth is variously given as 6 August 1938 and 20 August 1943.

Hayes moved to Memphis in the late Forties and took an active interest in music at high school. Among his fellow students was a local boy, David Porter, born on 21 November 1941. At the age of six, Porter sang in a gospel group at Rose Hill Baptist Church along with Maurice White, later of Earth, Wind and Fire. At night he performed in a string of Memphis clubs as Little David, and by 1961 had made his recording debut with 'Chivalry'/'Farewell' for the tiny local Eagle label. (In 1963, he recorded in Memphis with the Mar-Keys. These recordings appeared not on Stax but on the Newark-based Savoy label.) Porter first met Isaac Hayes at a talent show at the Palace Theatre on Beale Street. By then Hayes was leader and bass singer with the Teen-

ES FEVER

tones; Porter worked with the Marquettes. Anxious to make their mark, they began writing together.

Porter joined Stax as a staff writer in 1961, while in 1962 Hayes recorded for the local Youngstown label. These sides would also be re-issued on San-American and Brunswick. Hayes mastered piano, guitar and sax, and was soon proficient enough to join the Mar-Keys in jam sessions. Thus he attracted the attention of Stax company president Jim Stewart.

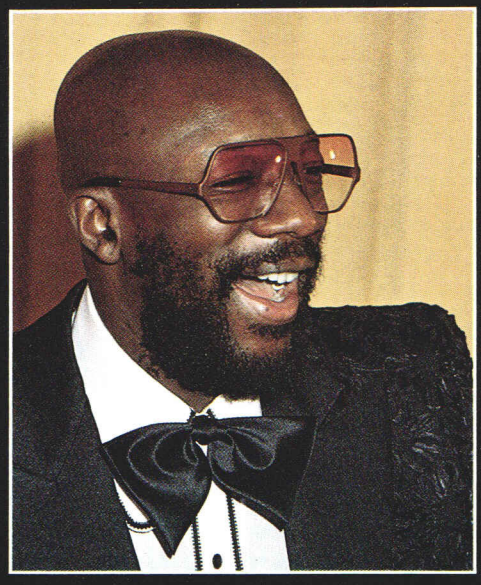
The result was regular session work for Stax and Atlantic, starting in 1963. In the halcyon days that followed, and particularly the three years from 1965 to 1967, Hayes' keyboard playing graced classic records from Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, Don Covay and Eddie Floyd. The sessions with Redding were especially important, as they enabled Hayes to watch a master of improvisation at close quarters. He saw songs evolve in the studio and began to appreciate the inevitability of the arrangements to which they were wedded. From Redding's singing he learned how to milk a song for every nuance, and how words and syllables themselves were the combustible elements of pure music.

The soul man cometh

With David Porter, Hayes' writing and production skills became a key factor in the success of Stax as the premier Southern R&B company. The duo nurtured Carla Thomas, Sam and Dave, Johnnie Taylor, the Emotions, the Soul Children and many more; two of the biggest hits of the period were 'Hold On I'm Coming' and 'Soul Man', R&B chart-toppers for Sam and Dave in 1966 and 1967 respectively.

A desultory appearance on Volt as Sir Isaac and The Do-Dads (1965), followed in September 1967 by the slapdash Atlantic album *Presenting Isaac Hayes*, hardly prepared the record business for the events of 1969. In that year executives of Gulf and Western, who had taken over Stax in May 1968, realised that marginally more affluent black audiences were switching from singles to albums. 28 LPs were commissioned immediately, and Hayes and Porter spent two arduous weeks recording all the big names at Stax. Then, realising that they were still an album short, Isaac Hayes took the Bar-Kays rhythm section into the studio and cut *Hot Buttered Soul* as a loose-limbed workout.

From its inception it was little more than an afterthought and received scant promotion after its release on the Stax subsidiary label, Enterprise. Imagine the astonishment, then, when it promptly outsold the company's entire roster and from August 1969 topped the jazz and soul charts. More important, it reached Number 8 in the pop album charts, made rapid inroads on MOR broadcasting schedules and opened up new avenues for black artists. Their music could break loose from the ghetto into the lucrative pastures of middle America. True, there had always been a coterie of white jazz aficionados buying albums, but the excursions of a larger, pop-oriented audience into R&B had been sporadic and confined to singles. Hayes changed all that at a stroke.



Above: Hayes in unfamiliar garb at a Grammy Award ceremony. His stage gear was somewhat less formal (left).

Rapping roots

Curiously enough, *Hot Buttered Soul* had its roots in a typically conservative Southern soul tradition. Rhythm'n'grit emotion collided with R&B, country and pop in a *mélange* that echoed the sentiment, if not the form, of the blues. Even the extended rap at the outset of 'By The Time I Get To Phoenix' was not without precedent. Hayes had employed it successfully on night-club audiences in Memphis for some years, combining gospel sermonising with street-corner jive and a ready wit to notable effect. Such monologues freed Hayes from the strictures of conventional singing, allowed him to give simple songs a deeper resonance and still retain the common touch. Audiences throughout America were able to respond to his colourful blend of soap-opera cliché and ghetto chic.

To some extent it was a formula anticipated by Solomon Burke and Joe Tex in the early Sixties. As an arranger and producer, however, Hayes was able to raise it to positively Gothic proportions. Strings, for example, had been used on R&B recordings by Carla Thomas, William Bell and Johnnie Taylor, but never with such shimmering extravagance. Hayes unleashed whole sections of the Memphis Symphony Orchestra on cuts that could run for 18 minutes or more. Cunningly he set the gutbucket fire of a progressive rhythm section – the newly-constituted Bar-Kays – against the silky sophistication of classical players. With multi-tracking and high-fidelity sound, Hayes took R&B to new levels of technical sophistication and applied his colours as he wished. It was a development echoed only by Motown's Norman Whitfield – but where the latter achieved diamond-hard psychedelia, Hayes retained warmth and soul amid the innovation.

Bald is beautiful

By recording romantic pop from the pen of Jimmy Webb, Hayes smashed a number of neuroses. Black artists had long recorded versions of white hits – Ray Charles with 'I Can't Stop Loving You', for instance – but the process had become difficult in a decade preoccupied with black identity. And, in any case, these artists had seldom taken the dangerous step of casting themselves in a primarily romantic role for white audiences. Now, suddenly, they could incorporate pop material without compromising their blackness and even play the stud for women across the United States, white or black. After Hayes, skin colour didn't matter. Why, you could even be bald and of indeterminate age and still ooze sex appeal. Gone were the airbrushed photographs and light make-up used in some vain bid to emulate Harry Belafonte or Johnny Mathis.

The biggest problem with Hayes was how to edit lengthy album tracks for release as singles. But the butchers triumphed, as ever, and 'By The Time I Got To Phoenix', backed with a sensuous version of Burt Bacharach and Hal David's 'Walk On By', again suitably truncated, was a double-sided hit on the R&B chart.

Issued in March 1970, *The Isaac Hayes Movement* served the same mixture of standards and steamy orchestral soul. The album emulated its predecessor's crossover success, peaking at Number 8 in the LP charts. Again the accent was Southern, florid and overripe, but there was no denying the power of cuts like 'I Stand Accused'. Hayes subjected Jerry Butler's classic to a painfully protracted rap before delivering cool country soul in the best traditions of

Toussaint McCall and O. V. Wright. Although Willie Mitchell had started producing Al Green with a similar combination of delicacy and symphonic opulence, Isaac Hayes' position as soul superstud remained unassailable.

November 1970 brought *To Be Continued* and the first hint of stagnation. 'Ike's Rap', intoned in a semi-articulate Marlon Brando mumble against a backdrop of cicadas in the sultry Memphis night, did little to dispel fears of decline. His mooning delivery of 'Our Day Will Come', capped by Bacharach and David's sickly 'The Look Of Love', made matters worse and the set – a Number 11 pop album – was redeemed only by the urgent 'Runnin' Out Of Fools'. April 1971 saw his slow version of 'Never Can Say Goodbye', a single that reached Number 22 nationally and served as a trailer for the *Black Moses* album. That it succeeded as a 45 was surprising, since the Jackson Five had taken it to Number 2 only weeks before.

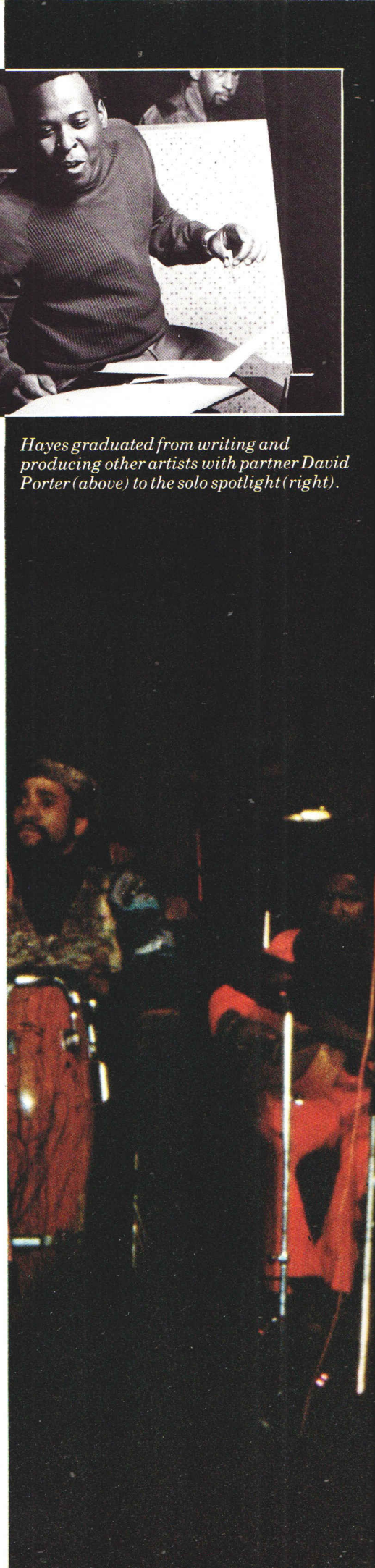
Shaft – can you dig it?

Hayes' career was recharged when film director Gordon Parks asked him to score *Shaft* (1971) for MGM. Hayes' music dominated and sold the picture by catching exactly the hustling mood of the day. Here come Isaac Hayes or John Shaft – take your pick – upwardly mobile and afire with black pride, straining to dump whitey on his backside at the hint of a sneer and shafting foxy ladies down the line. Black audiences cheered every screening, international audiences were entranced. From August 1971 the double album climbed to Number 1 in the American charts and miraculously settled at Number 12 in the UK. The title track fared even better when it was released as a single in October, topping the US Hot Hundred and reaching Number 4 in Britain. It also won the 1971 Best Song Oscar.

Overnight *Shaft*'s chattering wah-wah guitar became obligatory for private-eye movies, rapidly permeated the advertising world and enlivened countless soul records for a decade. Hollywood scrambled to make films about blacks and soul progressives queued to write soundtracks. The results were generally derivative, however, honourable exceptions being Curtis Mayfield's *Superfly*, Marvin Gaye's *Trouble Man* (both 1972) and Willie Hutch's *The Mack* (1973).

Unfortunately Hayes began to believe his own publicity and, although the *Black Moses* album from November 1971 sold heavily and rose to Number 10 in the rankings, it nonetheless represented the beginning of the end for Isaac Hayes as a major force. An affluent lifestyle and a penchant for supporting black community projects do not of themselves qualify someone for the role of shaman, especially when that person combines calculated eroticism with a whiff of the pimpwalk. Hayes' appearance at the August 1972 Wattstax festival in Los Angeles, decked out as Moses in chains and replete with codpiece, was faintly ridiculous; his performance paled beside allegedly lesser acts. Stax continued to milk *Shaft* and pushed Hayes into woeful film scores like *Three Tough Guys* and *Truck Turner* (in which he also starred as a freelance bounty hunter), both issued in 1974.

Hayes graduated from writing and producing other artists with partner David Porter (above) to the solo spotlight (right).



By now the Stax empire was falling and Hayes was involved in costly litigation accusing them of misrepresentation, falsification of sales and withholding royalties. He settled out of court when the label agreed to release him to ABC. Unfortunately the ensuing albums, *Chocolate Chip* (1975), *Groove-A-Thon* and *Juicy Fruit* (both 1976), failed to restore his reputation. Meanwhile Barry White, assisted by arranger Gene Page, stepped in with a particularly vulgar – and popular – dilution of Hayes' style. Hayes elected to change direction, producing the Isaac Hayes Movement and the Masqueraders with modest success.

To be continued . . .

Despite six acceptable albums of his own, cut for Polydor between 1977 and 1981, Hayes has remained aloof. On *Royal Rappin's* (1979) he consented to share vocal honours with Millie Jackson, while elsewhere he has preferred to write, arrange and produce for Linda Clifford, Dionne Warwick and Donald Byrd.

Although Hayes entered the Eighties still smouldering on the sidelines, it is for the years 1969-71 that he will be remembered. His tortuous raps licensed the Soul Children, Laura Lee, Millie Jackson, Margie Joseph, Shirley Brown, Barry White and many more. His arrangements affected everyone from Gene Page to MFSB and underpinned the entire disco explosion. His insistence that an album should be a unified whole, not just a collection of tracks, did for black music what the Beatles had achieved earlier in rock. His emphasis on total control as writer, producer and performer enlarged that achievement, but this – combined with the longer tracks he pioneered – gave room for a dangerous degree of self-indulgence hitherto rarely found in black music. His legacy is mixed.

CLIVE ANDERSON

MOVE ON UP

Curtis Mayfield: from Impression to superstar

THE CAREER OF Curtis Mayfield has spanned over a quarter of a century, both as a group member and a solo artist. During this time, he has proved a crucial influence on his chosen field of soul music. While never prolific, his recorded output has always been distinguished by a certain spiritual integrity, his occasional commercial successes only serving to highlight the vast wealth of his material that has remained sadly unrecognised.

Born in Chicago on 3 June 1942, Mayfield was already known as an accomplished guitarist when he was invited to join the Roosters (later the Impressions) in 1958. Since then, he has pioneered many breakthroughs in vocal and musical arrangements, while his own distinctive vocal style – brittle, yet tough – and versatile approach to the guitar have been much admired and imitated by other soul artists.

His career with the Impressions is bright with masterly compositions, arrangements and performances, and it is not surprising that some of them became massive hit singles. Hitmaking seems to have been a secondary consideration for the Impressions, but when the hits *did* come, they were superb. 'It's All Right' (1963), 'Woman's Got Soul' (1965) and 'You've Been Cheating' (1965) were soul/R&B songs of depth and character, and the gospel flavour of 'I'm So Proud' (1964) and 'Amen' proved Mayfield's songwriting versatility to be unequalled by anyone else in the field.

'Amen' was a Top Ten hit in America in 1965 – and it was also the turning-point in Mayfield's writing career. Its committed basis inspired him to write and record 'We're A Winner', the first of his many songs to deal with black society in the United States. Although its social comment was mild (especially when compared with Mayfield's later solo work in the early and mid Seventies) it was banned by many radio stations in America.

He later described the situation to *Melody Maker*: 'Of course when you make such statements you run into programme directors who feel that this isn't what they want their audiences to hear, even though it might be true. I look upon "We're A

Winner" as a song that anyone could listen to and take pride in being a part of, especially those minority groups who are actually experiencing the problems we have in our country.' 'We're A Winner' was one of the Impressions' last releases on ABC Records – although they had enjoyed the bulk of their commercial success with this label, Mayfield decided to set up his own operation.

After setting up his own record companies, Windy C Records in 1966 and Mayfield Records in 1967, he finally formed the Curtom label, on which the Impressions released 'Fool For You' in 1968, scoring a Number 22 hit. This was followed by another political song, 'This Is My Country'. The quality of these songs and the subsequent 'Seven Years', 'Choice Of Colours' and the magnificent 'Mighty Mighty Spade And Whitey' pushed back the frontiers of soul music as nothing before.

Mixing social comment with a musical dexterity unequalled by anyone else working in the field, the Impressions influenced many of the new, post-Motown and Stax-era soul singers to adopt a more radical lyrical stance while leaving the music with its traditional integrity. Mayfield, however, was getting restless as his lyrical brilliance outgrew the Impressions' more melodic intent. He left them in 1970 to pursue his own career, leaving behind *Check Out Your Mind* and the brilliant but sadly neglected *Young Mod's Forgotten Story*, two LPs that pointed the way forward into a more uncompromising treatment of socially uncomfortable themes.

Head-on attack

The radical themes of black power, militancy and violence were becoming more popular within American soul music at the time Mayfield went solo. Sly and the Family Stone, following Mayfield's own lyrical influence, had delivered *There's A Riot Goin' On*, and Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On* was in the making. In this turbulent atmosphere Curtis released his first single under his own name on the Buddah label. 'Don't Worry (If There's A Hell Below, We're All Going To Go)' came as a shock even to those who expected innovation from Mayfield. The mild politicising of his later lyrics for the Impressions had been abandoned in favour of a head-on attack. The music held no comforts for the listener either, its vicious fuzz-bass and screaming electric lead guitars combining with Henry Gibson's conga work.

'Don't Worry' was not a hit, but the following single, 'Move On Up', was a massive seller on both sides of the Atlantic. It was dance-floor genius with a lyrical statement exhorting black Americans to 'move on up to a greater day' – a song of hope with a shifting, exciting rhythm and a promise of even greater things to come. The full versions of both songs graced *Curtis*, his first solo LP, and served to give a deeper clarity and perspective to the rest of the material. The LP was magnificent, ranging from the gay abandon of 'Wild And Free' to the considered structure of 'Miss Black America'. Mayfield's arrangements breathed life and vigour into the songs and his grasp of melody, especially when delivered with that characteristic rasping falsetto, was a revelation.

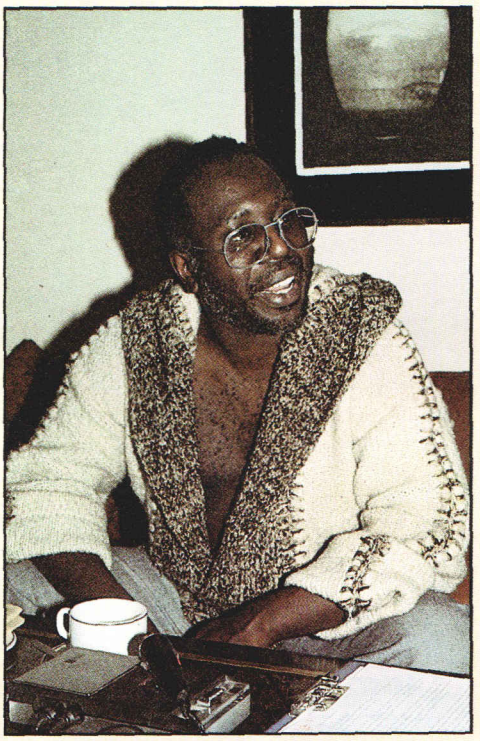
A commercially successful future looked certain, but Mayfield's integrity immersed him more deeply into his music at the expense of his public image. Then, in late 1971, followed a double LP, *Curtis Live*, on which Gibson's conga-playing was again outstanding. Recorded live at the Bitter End, a New York club, the album presented versions of Mayfield's songs from the Impressions' repertoire as well as his newer solo tracks. For the second time he met radio censorship with the song 'Stone Junkie'. Mayfield commented: 'I believe that anything that is happening should be told as it is. I could sit around here all day singing love, love, love, and shake it, shake it, and we're all having a good time, but the young are not fools. There's no need to play games today.'

Curtis Mayfield (above left and right) made his impression on soul music with a new political directness.

At this time Curtis and his now-regular working group paid a lightning visit to Britain and made an unofficial debut at the Speakeasy before opening the tour proper at the Rainbow Theatre. Despite the fact that the latter show was greeted with universal acclaim, the general feeling was that the intimacy of Mayfield's music was better suited to the smaller, more club-like venue. An appearance on BBC-TV's 'Old Grey Whistle Test' further enhanced his reputation in the UK.

Back in America, his second studio LP, *Roots*, took Mayfield even further away from traditional soul music and towards a hybrid of rock and funk. Only one song on the LP was under four minutes long, reflecting the trend of extended improvisation in rock. The fuzz guitars were again in evidence and on the song 'Underground', Mayfield arranged the lead electric guitar to play phrases more suited to a saxophone. But he was not making conventional soul music. He used Impressions arranger Johnny Pate for *Roots*, and even recruited Leroy Hutson, who had replaced him when he left the Impressions, to contribute backing vocals. The single 'We Got To Have Peace' failed and, just when it seemed that his approach would alienate even his most staunch admirers, Mayfield was invited to write the score for the film *Superfly* (1971).

Above: Curtis backs up his songs of racial harmony by jamming with white bluesmen Canned Heat. Below: Mayfield the businessman. Curtom Records played an increasingly important part in his musical life through the Seventies, but failed to sign or discover major artists of Curtis' calibre.



Back to the world

Isaac Hayes had enjoyed phenomenal success with his music for the first of the black detective films, *Shaft*, a year earlier and perhaps Mayfield saw *Superfly* as a way of regaining a more orthodox credibility among soul fans. Whatever his motives, the result was a success. The more traditional elements of funk were re-introduced into the music to produce a soundtrack LP that stood up on its own – a rare achievement. The *Superfly* LP, with its juxtaposition of songs and instrumentals, provided the violence of the film with an unusual counterpoint. The title track was a big hit, and the power of the words reflected Mayfield's social concerns.

Despite the film's concentration on the world of drugs, Mayfield's lyrics were scathing in their attacks on pushers and users. 'Freddie's Dead' was also released as a single and nominated for an Oscar as best song, but it was eventually withdrawn because of its lyrical content. The film was a huge success and even included footage of Curtis performing 'I'm Your Pusherman' in a nightclub.

When his next LP, *Back To The World*, was released in the summer of 1973 rock overtones had been eased out in favour of strings and brass. It was Mayfield's finest solo record to date, the title song dealing with repatriation for a veteran after returning from Vietnam, and 'Future Shock' developing his obsession with the place of the black man in American society. The album's successor, *Sweet Exorcist*, failed badly as a commercial venture, however, although its music was as good as ever. The single, 'Kung Fu', was tight and funky, the rest of the LP sparing in its intensity but full to the brim with evolutionary ideas.

The soulful *Got To Find A Way* in 1975 and the doom-laden *There Is No Place Like America Today* in 1976 also failed to re-establish Mayfield as a major contender, and although the critical acclaim never receded, commercial success failed to materialise. Mayfield, however, had little cause for worry as his other venture, the Curtom Record Company, had been steadily gathering momentum. Curtom had been originally distributed by Buddah Records, on which all of Mayfield's early solo material had been released, and its main role was to provide an outlet for Mayfield's formidable output of songs with little-known artists who deserved wider attention. However, the more successful Curtom ventures were the already-established Impressions' *Finally Got Myself Together* and *Leroy Hutson; The Man*.

Celluloid sounds

In 1977 Mayfield was signed for another film venture, *Short Eyes*, which told a brutal story about prison life. Again he composed all the music and sang all but one of the songs, as well as making an appearance in the film. Other films for which Mayfield wrote songs included *Claudine* (1974), *Let's Do It Again* (1975) and *Sparkle* (1976). *Let's Do It Again*'s box-office receipts made it one of the most successful black films of all time.

His releases subsequently became more sporadic; *Do It All Night* (1978) and *Heartbeat* (1979) were followed by a flirtation with disco music, which proved artistically disastrous. An album with Curtom artist Linda Clifford called *The Right Combination*, was primarily intended to promote his record label – an accusation that could not be levelled at his 1982 release, *Honesty*. Released through the Boardwalk label, this was hailed as a true return to form, with Mayfield in his element both as a social observer and as a sweet soul singer and balladeer. With Marvin Gaye's parallel re-emergence on *Midnight Love* and the resurgence of public interest in soul music generally, prospects again seemed bright. But however the future treats Curtis Mayfield, his vast legacy and imperious track record will ensure his place in the history of soul music.

TED GIBBONS

Curtis Mayfield
Recommended Listening

Curtis (Buddah Super 2318 015) (Includes: Move On Up, Miss Black America, Wild And Free, The Makings Of You, Don't Worry [If There's A Hell Below We're All Going To Go], We The People Who Are Darker Than Blue); *Superfly* (Buddah Super 2318 065) (Includes: Freddie's Dead, Little Child Running Wild, Eddie You Should Know Better, Think, Pusherman, Junkie Chase).

LaBelle
WITH LOVE

The space-age soul of Sarah, Nona and Patti

Birds of an exotic feather: Sarah Dash, Nona Hendryx and Patti LaBelle.

OF ALL THE SOUL acts to greet the Seventies with a display of space-age chic, LaBelle seemed least likely. To their old followers, it seemed that they had been on the chitterling circuit too long to undergo such a rigorous transformation. Lead singer Patti LaBelle was born Patricia Louise Holt-Edwards in Philadelphia on 4 October 1944, and rapidly absorbed the gospel tradition, joining Cynthia 'Cindy' Birdsong in a local group called the Ordettes in 1959. The following year, promoter

The colourful plumage modelled by Patti (above left) and Sarah (above right) transformed Patti LaBelle and the Bluebelles (opposite) into LaBelle (above far right).

Bernard Montague introduced them to Sarah Dash and Wynona Hendryx, who had been part of another Philly group, the Del-Capris. The new quartet moved to Harold B. Robinson's Newtown label where they recorded some dozen sides as Patti LaBelle and the Bluebelles.

They had their first real hit in August 1963 when 'Down The Aisle' appeared in the R&B charts. Then Newtown was swallowed by the burgeoning giant Cameo-Parkway; the new label failed to develop their talents, preferring cheerful pop performers like Chubby Checker to R&B. The Bluebelles secured only one minor R&B chart hit on the label in January 1964 with a tired show-tune by Rodgers and Hart, 'You'll Never Walk Alone'. If nothing else, it showed how Patti LaBelle could take a song from a whisper to a scream, giving it a thrilling new resonance. Such dynamic presence kept them in the public eye when they were booked for a string of shows at the Uptown, Philadelphia and the Apollo, New York – engagements that finally brought them to the attention of Atlantic Records.

Their first work for the label consisted of live recordings made at the Uptown and the Brooklyn Fox in July and December 1964. Incredibly, they had to wait until October the following year before they were granted a studio session. This produced the soulful 'Patti's Prayer' and a minor hit in 'All Or Nothing'. But Atlantic did little more than take the group as they found them, and the Bluebelles marked time with a clutch of unsuccessful singles until their departure from the label in October 1969. Only 'I'm Still Waiting' (1966) and 'Take Me For A Little While' (1967) had created any ripples. Cindy Birdsong, frustrated with their lack of success, left to replace Florence Ballard in the Supremes in 1967. The end of the Sixties saw the Bluebelles reduced to a trio and stagnating on the small club circuit.

A fortuitous meeting with Vicki Wickham at Buddah Records in New York changed everything. Wickham readily recognised R&B talent, and, ever since her days in British TV with the production team of 'Ready, Steady, Go!', had proved herself adept at presentation. There was a glut of predictably glamorous black girl groups in soul, but none were making inroads in rock. Wickham became the Bluebelles' manager, changed their name to LaBelle and pushed both their image and their music in the 'progressive' direction of Sly and the Family Stone.

The refurbished trio made their first appearance at New York Town Hall in 1970, clad in denim and wrapping their tongues around improbable lyrics. Conservative Patti worried because she felt that sharply-dressed soul audiences would fail to relate to their new image and songs. Nona, on the other hand, was desperate for change. She didn't share Patti's gospel roots and was more sympathetic to rock. By process of natural selection she became lyricist and spokeswoman for the group.

Their new career got off to a slow start; the albums *LaBelle* (1971) and *Moonshadow* (1972), both recorded for Warner Brothers, were limply promoted. 1971 also saw them contributing backing vocals to Laura Nyro's *Gonna Take A Miracle*. They registered more strongly with *Pressure Cookin'* (1973), their sole album outing for RCA. With the inclusion of 'Open Up Your Heart', a song specially commissioned from Stevie Wonder, and Gil Scott-Heron's 'The Revolution Will Not Be Televised', they established an incisive new image with the potential to reach both rock and soul fans.

Their debut album for Epic, neatly titled *Nightbirds*, and produced under the aegis of Allen Toussaint in New Orleans during 1974, was a remarkable fusion of funk, rock and gospel. Leo Nocentelli of the Meters provided tormented lead guitar over Toussaint's swirling keyboards. Bob Crewe's voodoo pastiche, 'Lady Marmalade', perverted the Creole tradition to provide the sexual invitation: 'Voulez-vous coucher avec moi ce soir?'. A smash hit, it introduced the notion of LaBelle as sexually liberated necromancers, an image which was reinforced by dark ballads like Nona's title track and by their bizarre stage costumes, funky spacesuits of feathers and armour plate. After their 'Nightbirds' extravaganza at the Metropolitan Opera House New York and at London's Drury Lane, they became the essence of chic, attracting fervent admirers of every sexual persuasion.

Ashes to ashes

The next year's LP, *Phoenix*, again produced by Toussaint, marked time. The space fantasies were enlarged, with a richer sound and overwrought vocals, while Nona Hendryx introduced a disturbing mysticism on songs like 'Slow Burn'. The album contained no surprises, however; LaBelle were faced with the problem of how to move forward before their extraordinary theatre of rock'n'soul became utterly dated. After *Chameleon*, slickly produced by Pointer Sisters mentor David Rubinson in California during 1976, the three decided to pursue solo careers. This final album was arguably their finest, and it certainly represents the flowering of Nona's remarkable writing talent. The title track, 'Come Into My Life' and 'A Man In A Trenchcoat' were powerful, idiosyncratic songs, while the gospel-based 'Going Down Makes Me Shiver', a daring celebration of oral sex, was particularly perverse in its combination of sacred music and sexual lyrics.

Since LaBelle's demise in 1977 Nona pursued her rock predelictions with varying success on Epic, Arista and Metropolis, also contributing to the Talking Heads LP *Remain In Light* (1980). Sarah Dash delivered three polished soul sets for Don

Kirshner's eponymous label, and Patti LaBelle cut five albums for Columbia/Epic. In the cold light of day Patti's blend of no-nonsense R&B, leavened with a little supper-club sophistication, seemed the most durable formula for success; 1983 saw her racing up the US soul chart with 'The Best Is Yet To Come', her contribution to the Grover Washington album of the same name.

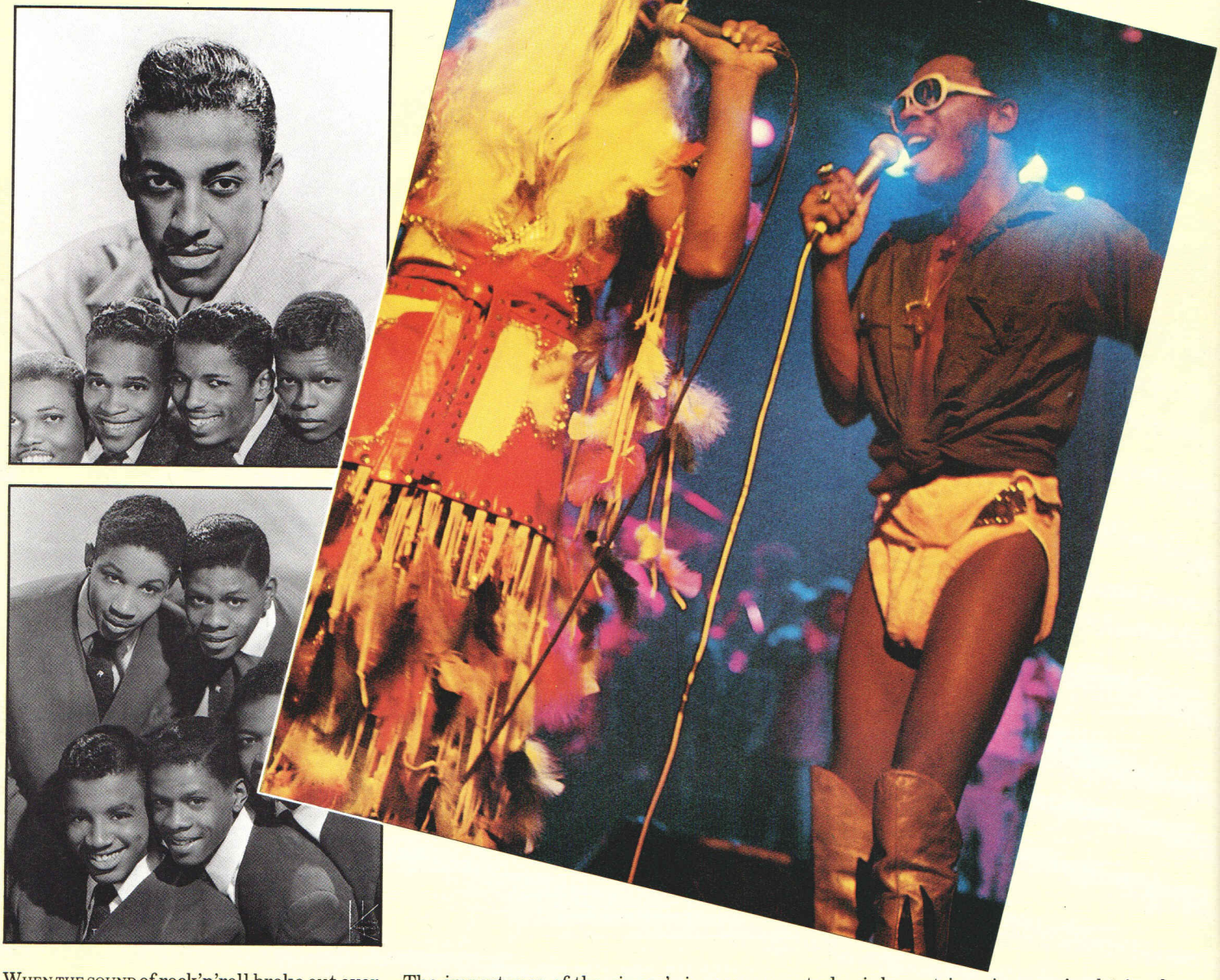
CLIVE ANDERSON

LaBelle
Recommended Listening

Nightbirds (Epic EPC 80566) (Includes: Lady Marmalade, Are You Lonely, It Took A Long Time, Space Children, All Girl Band, Don't Bring Me Down, Somebody Somewhere).

PUTTING ON THE STYLE

The ever-changing image of black stars



WHEN THE SOUND of rock'n'roll broke out over America in the mid Fifties, it spread the phraseology, music and dress of the black ghettoes. The shock that swept the United States was largely dependent upon white youth adopting the ways of a race still considered by many white Americans to be ignorant and inferior. By defining rock 'n'roll's style – with its flamboyance, its rhythmic drive, its overt sexuality and its critical look at authority – as black style, its participants made the music an unashamedly rebel one that could not immediately be absorbed into establishment showbusiness.

The black singer's dress and his attitude in song were embodiments of the fact that his race was at odds with white authority. The importance of the singer's image was nothing new – it had been crucial in the growth and popularity of both jazz and the blues. These genres presented two sides of life for the American black – jazz was the music of the city slicker and the ghetto sophisticate, blues that of the poor and barely literate farm or factory worker.

By the Forties, jazz was as concerned with style as it was with music. The jazz audience identified itself with the attitudes inherent in a jazzman's playing by copying his lifestyle, his clothes and habits and by talking his barely comprehensible jargon. Musicians of the calibre of Charlie Parker and Lester Young were role models for young blacks and white bohemians unwilling to support the mainstream jazz of Nat King Cole. Their style was taken up as a rejection of conventionality and the restrictions of society's rules.

Top left: Seductive Sonny Til looms over his Orioles. Their visual style, however, remained impeccably smooth, as did that of fellow doowoppers the Five Willows (above left). Seventies funksters Parliament (above) provided an outrageous contrast.

Lyrics and lifestyles

Whereas the jazz image conjured up a certain amount of luxury and reflected a society that had the resources to buy clothes and drink and visit nightclubs, the blues was concerned with a presentation of self within social confines; the bluesman

was inescapably part of poor society, and could only fight against it. Rather than craving the expensive lifestyle he lacked, the bluesman often concentrated his anger into the hostile shouted lyrics and the incessant rhythmic drive of the postwar urban era.

When rock came along, it took elements from both jazz and blues and welded them together with something all its own – a powerful, aggressive sexuality. The performance of the black vocal group was centred around a commitment to sensual pleasure that, to a white audience, was exotic and somewhat frightening. Black lyrics sold the promise of true love, but they were concerned rather with the white heat of passion than the rosy glow of romance. And the singers were not afraid to demonstrate it. Sonny Til of the Orioles was one of the first performers to bring explicit sexuality into his act – he moved seductively and caressed the air with his hands, so that his black audience responded with a series of ribald comments.

Clothes reinforced the idea that the singers were sexual predators. Suits were smart, shoes were sharp; the singer was smoothly groomed. Instead of neutralising the singer's potency, the well-dressed look emphasised it by contrast – and was also useful in making the black musician acceptable to whites. Chuck Berry, in the Fifties, was one such star. Immaculately dressed in a white suit, he proceeded to taunt his audience with knowing leers, using his guitar as a blatant sexual symbol. Even in films like *Go Johnny Go!*, in which he played Uncle Tom to Alan Freed's Master, he managed to imply that he was unwilling to accept any rules other than his own.

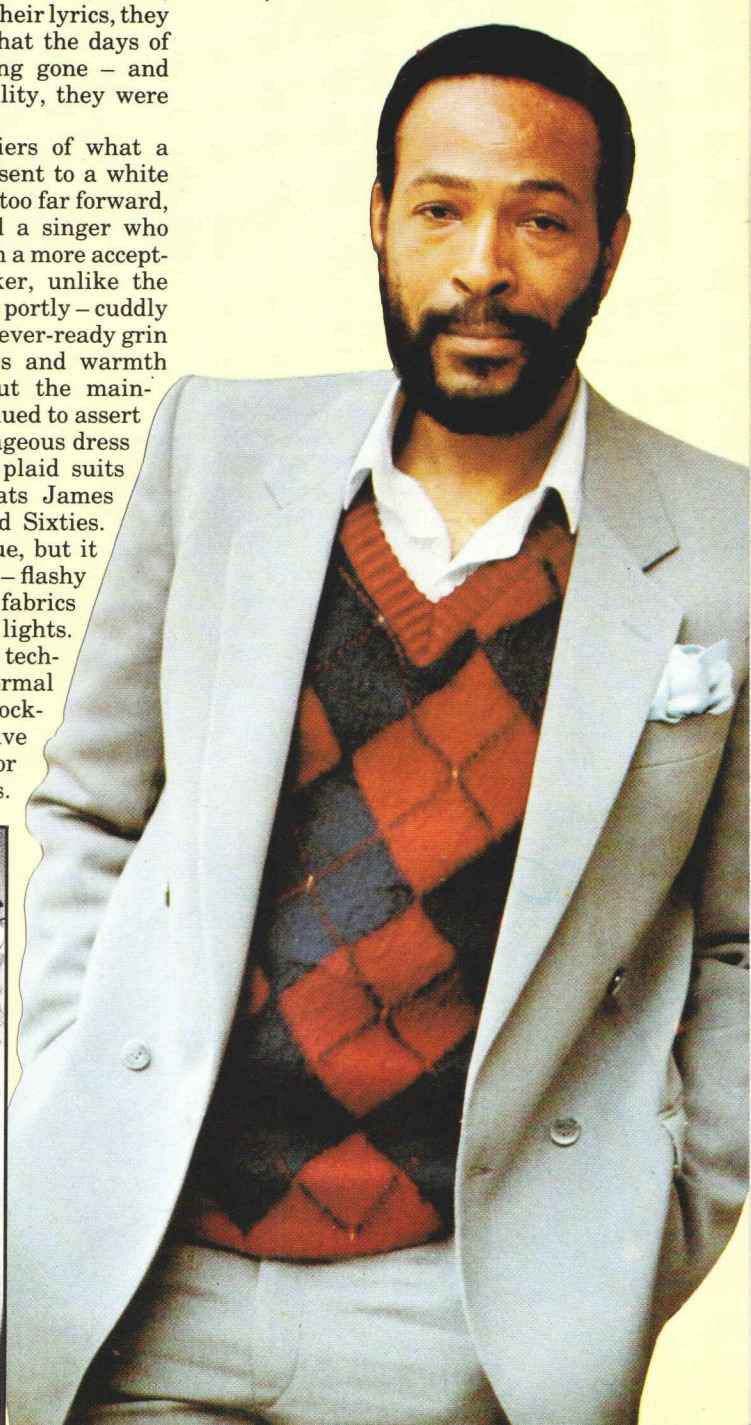
Dance stance

The sexual innuendo that Chuck Berry had implied in the handling of his guitar was developed more explicitly in the dance routines and gymnastics used by Jackie Wilson and James Brown. Dance had always been part of a black musical act's presentation, even with vocal groups like the Cadillacs, but both Wilson and Brown used dance less as a visual entertainment than a primitive courting ritual. The sheer athleticism of their movements was wedded to a sinuous sexuality. The public image of black singers exuded confidence; in all they did, their movements, dress, their stage display, and in their lyrics, they proclaimed the message that the days of black oppression were long gone – and that, in the field of sexuality, they were masters.

Fearing that the frontiers of what a black performer could present to a white audience had been pushed too far forward, the record industry found a singer who could present a new style in a more acceptable form. Chubby Checker, unlike the athletic James Brown, was portly – cuddly rather than sexy – with an ever-ready grin that indicated friendliness and warmth rather than rebellion. But the mainstream of black rock continued to assert its sexuality with an outrageous dress sense, symbolised by the plaid suits and ill-matching waistcoats James Brown adopted in the mid Sixties. The suit remained in vogue, but it took on an exotic character – flashy colours and shimmering fabrics glinted under the stage lights. The women used the same technique of combining the formal with the far-out, wearing cocktail dresses that would have been conventional but for their gaudy colours.

Dressed like this, artists from Motown, the biggest black-owned label, could aim at the pop market, and at white as well as black record buyers. Commercially successful singers could not rely on a style that was aimed solely at the black ghettoes, and an image had to be constructed that was true to black heritage and at the same time fitted in with white expectations and prejudices. Whereas earlier black singers could content themselves with the knowledge that their outrageous and rebellious individuality was a prime reason for their success in the white market, the Motown image had to be more universal, and therefore more respectable. For the first time, the record company it-

Reflections . . . Duke Ellington (below left) and LaBelle (bottom left) brush up their images. Marvin Gaye (below) went for a more relaxed look in the Seventies, adopting the suit and sweater of the mature man of leisure.



The new clothes style was associated more with the rock community than with the black population. Sly Stone merged rhinestoned country clothing with psychedelic rock; Isaac Hayes presented himself as a sophisticated white-slave trader; and Curtis Mayfield and Marvin Gaye adopted a more casual, leatherware look – sweaters, jeans and suede jackets. Sly Stone and Isaac Hayes took fantasy roles unassociated with ghetto realities, while Gaye and Mayfield strengthened the universality of their lyrics through a visual image that was not racially specific.

From the beginnings of rock to the Eighties, the public image presented by black performers has developed from an aggressive sneer at white values into the first flowerings of a self-evaluation that no longer threatens white morality – one that stresses black pride rather than black anger. This softening is part of the greater musical and stylistic integration that has come with an increased cross-fertilisation between black and white music. PAUL FRYER

The image of Motown's stars underwent a big change in the late Sixties and early Seventies. The Temptations and Diana Ross and the Supremes (left), early subjects for Berry Gordy's grooming, had a smooth, nightclub air about them. The Jackson Five (below), no less professional, wore afros and chunky, if matching, fabrics.

self came to control the public image presented by its singers.

The rise of the Stax label in the mid Sixties coincided with the peak of two trends in black rock – on the one hand the singer as hustler, and on the other a more middle-class presentation of the black self. The first group was represented by Wilson Pickett, Joe Tex and Solomon Burke, and the second by Otis Redding, who adopted the polo-necked sweater – never a style popular in the ghettoes – and combined it with the more traditional suit to suggest a relaxed man of leisure. The adoption of white dress conventions was an aid to Redding in his move towards a white audience, and he was taken up by them as a black hero.

Shopping for clothes

New styles not associated with the ghettoes gained rapid acceptance towards the end of the decade. Whether this meant going towards African roots, or towards integrationist America, the pose of the hustler was ignored in favour of the 'natural man', a man with deep feelings about his past. The overt Africanisms in clothing and ideology were found most commonly within the jazz community, where dashikis and Afro hairstyles became the norm. In soul, the Afro was sported by artists as diverse as Aretha Franklin, Michael Jackson and Stevie Wonder. The greased, coloured and straightened hair, and the suits that had been the fashion up until the mid Sixties were rejected as copies of white fashion.

THE GREAT MUSICIANS

Topper Headon

Having weathered the first storms of the punk revolution to emerge as one of the leaders of the movement, the Clash suddenly found themselves drummerless with the departure of Terry Chimes early in 1977. Undaunted, the group held auditions and – according to leader Joe Strummer – 205 hopefuls failed to make the grade until the arrival of Nicky 'Topper' Headon. Although Topper had been working on the edge of the music business for some years (he had played in a number of groups including the London SS with Clash guitarist Mick Jones), it was his five-year stint with the Clash that established him as a drummer of renown.

Proving himself a more than competent anchorman during his first months with the Clash, Topper first made his presence felt on vinyl in 1978 with *Give 'Em Enough Rope*. There could be no doubting Topper's contribution to the success of the album, whether on 'Tommy Gun', based on a succession of crisp 'military' snare-drum rolls, or on 'Stay Free', where the simple two-in-the-bar feel of the guitar riff was skilfully subverted by the overlay of a syncopated drum pattern that provided the number with much of its dynamic interest.

By the end of 1978 the new wave was becoming more receptive to other music, and the Clash's magpie enthusiasm for utilising different forms alighted on reggae. Topper is one of the few white drummers to have any real feeling for the music, showing that there is more to reggae drumming than simply accentuating the third beat in every bar. The reworking of the Maytals' 'Pressure Drop' in 1979 was one of the Clash's most successful covers, the rhythm being pushed forward irresistably by the light yet powerful skipping beat of the drums. This infatuation with the sounds of the Caribbean developed further; the next album, *London Calling* (1979), included several reggae-influenced numbers including 'Revolution Rock', 'Rudie Can't Fail' and 'The Guns Of Brixton' – the latter a superb song, owing much to the dramatic interplay of Topper's drums with Paul Simenon's bass guitar. *London Calling* was marked by a bewildering diversity of musical styles which opened up new possibilities for the drummer: the sleazy shuffle of 'Jimmy Jazz' and the relentless thrash breathing new life into 'Brand New Cadillac' being prime examples.

The Clash's association with reggae producer Mikey Dread in 1981 led to a move towards a heavy dub/roots reggae sound; in many ways a musical cul-de-sac (the uninspired 1980 single, 'Bank Robber', for example), it had a short-lived but considerable influence on Topper's playing that was audible on the triple album *Sandinista*, released in 1980. He extended his range further on *Sandinista*, however, developing a snappy disco-funk beat for the rapping number 'The Magnificent Seven' or, in complete contrast, supplying the delicate percussion to the opening of 'Rebel Walz'. On the latter, Headon cleverly avoided the rhythmic pitfalls often associated with tunes written in waltz-time by employing a simple drum pattern that anticipated the first beat in the bar, thereby giving a subtle rhythmic push to the song.

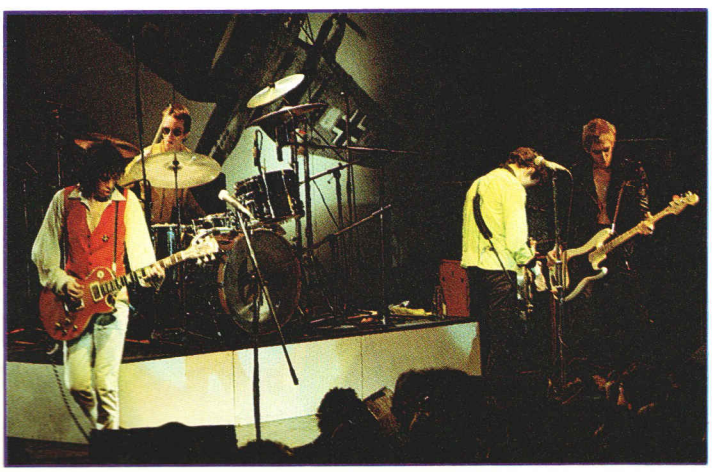
Following 'The Magnificent Seven', the new Clash funk-beat was to be heard on 1981's 'Radio Clash' and most notably on 'Funk Out' – from *Combat Rock* (1982) – which was a hard-driving pastiche of New York funk. The drumming on *Combat Rock* was as inventive as ever, each number receiving its own particular treatment. A distinctive 'heavy' drum sound was to be heard on 'In A Car Jam', while 'Rock The Casbah' featured a number of humorous touches including a 'space invaders/jet fighter' electronic-drum sequence. The doom-laden atmosphere of the Vietnamese jungle was recaptured on 'Sean Flynn' through the skilful manipulation of various percussive and electronic devices, while the melancholic 'Death Is A Star' saw Topper take up the brushes to provide a haunting counterpoint to Mick Jones' guitar.

A developing tendency within Headon's drumming, evident on *Combat Rock*, was the move away from emphasising the off-beat (beats two and four in a four-bar measure) to a looser and extended rhythmic pattern normally carried over a couple of bars, as, for example, on certain sections of 'Red Angel Dragnet'. He retained his tough, uncompromising delivery, however, combining this with an intelligent appreciation of the music as a whole – a trait rare in the rock drumming fraternity.

Topper Headon and the Clash parted company shortly after the completion of *Combat Rock*; he was replaced by the group's first drummer, Terry Chimes. Few who have seen the Clash live could doubt the central role Topper played in the group; possessing an excellent sense of time he was able to mark out the pulse that so often held together the more volatile elements of the Clash. Even on the rare bad nights – out-of-tune guitars, poor sound – Topper would press on, rallying the group around a rock-fast rhythm.

ADRIAN GILBERT

Below: As the Clash's stage presentation grew in complexity, Topper Headon provided the necessary sheet-anchor. Below right and overleaf: Topper stays on top of the beat.



THE HISTORY OF Rock